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ABSTRACT

America has not attained its goal of a fully literate and educated population. In order to assure high school graduation for all students, states must undertake new initiatives to reach the one out of four youth who does not graduate. Substantial changes in education policy and in school practice are necessary to accomplish this objective. These changes include the following: (1) increase government funding for education at federal, state, and local levels; (2) strengthen the practice of teaching; (3) change school programs so that they are more effective; (4) create partnerships among parents, communities and schools; (5) improve programs for health, housing and other social sectors which have an impact on student well-being and (6) initiate outreach from the schools to other public and private agencies which may be able to help with these changes. (VM)

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COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

POLICY STATEMENT

ASSURING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS AT RISK

Approved Unanimously by the Members of the Council
Annual Meeting at Asheville, North Carolina
November 16, 1987

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Introduction

An imperative for America's 21st Century is high school graduation for virtually all students.

During the past several years, the states have undertaken strong initiatives to increase expectations and standards for students and to enhance state support for the schools. The states must now take the necessary steps to assure these new expectations are met by all students.

From the beginning, this nation has been committed to education as fundamental to the success of a free democratic republic. Over two centuries we have made profound advances in expanding educational opportunity to assure our form of government and our quality of life. Increasingly, we have realized that our entire population must be literate and well-educated for our social, economic, and political effectiveness. We have moved toward the objective of a fully literate and educated population. But we have not attained it!

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Our nation is at risk of starting the 21st Century with one of four youngsters failing to complete the essentials of learning. There was a time in this nation when school failure and little education did not foreclose a person's options for a self-sufficient and fulfilling life nor impede the nation's capacity in trade, defense, environmental condition, or quality of life. That time is gone. Technological advances, demographic changes, international competition, and intense pressures of providing a better life for greater numbers of people on a seemingly shrinking planet today require a citizenry educated at least through high school graduation. This is imperative for our nation.

We are not meeting that imperative. One of four youth does not graduate. The greatest proportions of those who are at risk of not graduating are poor (urban and rural), minority, and of limited English proficiency. We must serve them by taking several actions now. The high school class of 2000 entered kindergarten this year. Children of the classes of 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004 are already born--one quarter of them living in poverty. Our society must commit more resources for education of quality. We must strengthen the practice of teaching. We must provide help and incentives for schools to change their programs to succeed with children at risk.

Above all we must make a commitment of will to a nationwide goal of high school graduation for virtually all students. This

commitment of will must be manifest in our states' assurances of education quality for all and states' guarantees of the affirmative practices which are necessary for children at risk to graduate.

Principles

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) holds these principles:

- In each state there must be an equitable opportunity for each person to earn a high school diploma at public expense.
- Each person, with the rare exceptions of some who have severe disabilities, has the capacity to meet the standards for a high school diploma.
- Recognizing that different individuals learn in different ways, how students are successfully taught should vary; what each student learns, however, must include a challenging and common curriculum.
- As the nation's chief education officers, our obligation is to provide education programs and to assure other necessary related services so that this nation enters the 21st Century with virtually all students graduating from high school.

Reality--1987

The stark reality is that we have not yet found the way to succeed with the one-quarter of all students who do not complete high school. Students not graduating or not likely to graduate are at risk of lifelong dependence.

We have abundant analysis and evidence that students at risk are often poor, minority, or non-English-speaking. Students at risk frequently lack community and family support. Evidence shows clearly the schools' failure to serve students at risk results from these factors: low expectations for student performance, inadequate resources, uneven quality of teaching staff, absence of close school/home connections, and the inadequacy of school programs.

We believe our students have the capacity to learn and our educational system has the capacity to teach so that the objective for Year 2000 for high school graduation for virtually all students can be attained. To accomplish this objective will require substantial changes in education policy and in school practice now.

State Assurances

In the United States, elementary and secondary education is fundamentally a state responsibility. The basic obligation to provide education is lodged at the state level where state law assigns authority to local and state jurisdictions.

Three levels of government--local, state, and federal--share financial support for education. Nationwide and local objectives must be assisted by funding at the federal and local levels.

This funding, together with support from the states, must increase to meet obligations to children at risk.

The states must lead the way to provide resources so that all schools offer a program of high quality, to strengthen the practice of teaching in all schools, to provide help and incentive for all schools to increase their effectiveness, and to assure all children the guarantee of genuine opportunity for high school graduation backed by affirmative practices for children at risk.

State Government Assurance

The laws of each state should provide for an elementary and secondary education program of high quality for all students. State law should provide the supporting health, social welfare, employment, housing, safety, transportation, and other human services which, together with the educational programs, are reasonably calculated to enable all persons to graduate from high school. These supporting services are essential for educational success. Recognizing their special needs, children and youth at risk of failure to graduate from high school should be guaranteed the following:

Guarantees

- An education program of the quality available to students who attend schools with high rates of secondary school graduates. The program should be

supplemented by education services that are integrated with the regular program and are necessary for the student to make progress toward high school graduation and to graduate.

- Enrollment in a school which demonstrates substantial and sustained student progress which leads at least to graduation from high school.

- Enrollment in a school with an appropriately certified staff which has continuous professional development.

- Enrollment in a school with systematically designed and delivered instruction of demonstrable effectiveness, and with adequate and up-to-date learning technologies and materials of proven value.

- Enrollment in a school with safe and functional facilities.

- A parent and early childhood development program beginning ideally for children by age three, but no later than age four.

- A written guide for teaching and learning for each student, prepared with and approved by the student and parents, which maps the path to high school graduation.

- A program for participation of families as partners in learning at home and at school as their children proceed toward high school graduation.

- Effective supporting health and social services to overcome conditions which put the student at risk of failing to graduate from high school.

- Education information about students, schools, school districts, and the states to enable identification of students at risk and to report on school conditions and performance. The information must be sufficient to let one know whether the above guarantees are being met and to provide a basis for local and state policies to improve student and school performance.

- Procedures by which students and parents or their representatives can be assured these guarantees are met.

Implementation

The assurances and guarantees in state education law will likely take different form in the several states. State laws vary in their format, definition, existent substantive provisions, assignment of authority to either state or local jurisdictions, funding provisions or obligations, and implementation dates. The Council advocates that the state government assurances and guarantees presented here be authorized by each state through specific statutory provisions appropriate to each state. To assist the states in legislative or regulatory action to implement these assurances and guarantees, the Council has prepared a model state statute. This example of a state statute included in Attachment 1 provides one means of implementation which a state could use. The precise form of statutory commitment must be in the hands of each state. The commitment to the principles and the implementation of the assurances and guarantees stated here is the common and essential part of this Council's position.

Conclusion

The imperative for beginning America's 21st Century with high school graduation for virtually all students demands unprecedented and bold actions by the states. The states together must express a will to succeed. The expression must become manifest in actions to authorize assurances and education guarantees. Other actions must also be taken. Attachment 2

includes suggested actions which the Council recommends on the basis of promising practices in one or more of the states.

To meet the imperative the states and local and federal governments must increase resources for education; the practice of teaching must be strengthened; schools must be helped to change their programs and improve their effectiveness; parents and communities must be engaged with schools in full partnerships. In addition to advances within the education system, there must be a new harmony of education and related support programs. Ill health, poor housing, inadequate nutrition, unsafe streets--these promote the conditions of risk. They are conditions to be changed together with school improvement. Evoking change is a multi-agency responsibility. It requires reaching out from education to other systems and actions by public authorities who are responsible for these combinations of service. A commitment to such outreach must be made.

The class of 2000 started kindergarten this fall. Think of the eager learning and vigorous play of those children. Who among them should drop out by 2000? None! But if conditions continue as today, one of four will be lost. One by one, each of those children must be guided during the next thirteen years along the path to graduation. This is imperative for them and for our nation!